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Souvenir salvage and the death of great naval ships

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Abstract

This paper examines the social and physical death of naval ships as a form of military material culture. It draws on ethnographic research with veteran's associations in the UK and US, and in a UK ship breaking yard, to explore the relationship of a naval ship's social and physical death to memorialisation, souvenir manufacture and souvenir salvage. A naval ship's social death is argued to animate a distributed community of ex-naval personnel, for whom it is normative to memorialise 'their ship', and to materialise their sociality, and residue military masculinities, through a range of manufactured souvenirs worn in everyday life. The social death of naval ships has, until recently, been largely disconnected from the sites of their physical death, or destruction, but the advent of ethical disposal policies in the UK has brought about the geographical compression of the two. The paper charts three phases of ex-naval personnel's engagement with the destruction of 'their ship': pilgrimage, souvenir salvage and collective memorialisation. We argue that proximate visualised destruction makes ex-naval personnel witnesses to an object death. More generally, the paper highlights that resource recovery regimes need to be thought not through recycling and the equivalence of objects as materials, but through reincarnation. As we show, the reincarnation of 'great things' does not always become them.

Key words:

Souvenirs, memorialisation, object destruction, recycling as reincarnation, ships, military masculinities

This paper seeks to advance debate on the material culture of war by thinking through military material culture as it permeates civilian life. We do this by paying attention to the extended social lives of military things and their passage through value regimes, connecting end-of-life, or rubbish value, military objects to the transition from military to civilian life that has been a key concern of research on military masculinities. Making this connection enables us to show the complexities of souvenir value in military material culture and particularly in end-of-life military objects. More broadly, it allows us to show that the resource recovery, or recycling, of end-of-life military things is open to salvage, and souvenir creation. It also affirms recent arguments in material culture studies that read recycling through reincarnation (Norris, 2008).

Research on war, warfare and soldiering show they have always been a *matériel* culture (Schofield, Johnson and Beck, 2002). But, whilst explosive ordnance and weapons have often driven the nomenclature and identities of military units and personnel (from musketeer to lancers, to grenadiers and on to riflemen), and military uniforms remain an arena of vastly formalised ritual signification, the more, or often less, deadly stuff of warfare has rarely been considered as a cultural artefact. Indeed, as Nicholas Saunders argues, the study of the material culture of war has been a neglected field in both material culture studies and conflict studies (Saunders, 2004). Saunders has addressed this self-identified lacuna himself, in a series of books and papers which focus on the material culture of the First World War (Saunders, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004). Allied to this, an emergent archaeology of war, focusing upon battlefield reconstruction, the memorialisation of wars and the rise of battlefield tourism, has addressed both the material remains of warfare and its commemoration. Studies have looked across the range of sites of conflict, dissecting forms of official and unofficial commemoration and pilgrimage to scenes of conflict, preserved landscapes, lost landscapes, monuments at key sites, and monuments at a remove from such sites – highlighting biases in favour of victors, to be sure, but also towards combatants over non-combatants, and competing state-authorised narratives, local and combatant accounts (Dobinson et al, 1997; Saunders, 2001; Cocroft and Thomas, 2003; Muzaini and Yeoh, 2005). Of greater interest to this paper, however, is work on how the more or less deadly *matériel* of war is transformed through the actions of soldiers and civilians into

memorabilia, of which the most famous case is trench art (Schofield et al, 2002; Saunders, 2003). Saunders identifies three modes of salvaging war debris: that aesthetically re-worked by military personnel; that which became the raw materials for a souvenir industry directed towards battlefield tourism and pilgrimage (which may displace local memories of the site, see for instance Stanley, 2000, on Guadalcanal); and the debris appropriated in war zones as the personal memento, but subsequently re-worked by cultural intermediaries as domestic memorabilia.

All three categories bring war, in the form of re-worked debris, into the domestic, where its display and care is positioned by Saunders within Susan Stewart's (1993) classic account of the souvenir and its articulation of absent presence and loss. More recently, and building on this work, Simon Harrison (2008) has tracked the biographies and types of artefacts taken by soldiers from fallen enemy in the Second World War, their bartering and exchange during the period of combat, between frontline and rear echelon troops, and the spinning of narratives of (true or invented) associations around and through them for audiences back home. Invested with legal and symbolic resonances dependent on whether they were generic equipment or personal and identifiable effects, these artefacts become part of the symbolic resources for memory and stories told by veterans over the subsequent years. Increasing moves for the restitution and repatriation of such trophies and mementos render these artefacts as having the opposite effect of Maussian gifts. Rather than maintaining social relations, the sending home of these artefacts is seen as separation, as putting memories away. Looking at the less personal debris of war -- in this case shrapnel in the Second World War -- Gabriel Moshenska has shown how this was appropriated by children into cultures of collecting, exchange and disposal, taking 'its place alongside marbles, comics and trading cards in the cut-throat economy of the playground' (2008, p. 120). In this work, the debris of warfare refuses to become bound-up in the souvenir form, but circulates in the playground economy, before losing its patina and falling out of exchange. War debris here becomes a means not to remembering but a means to making social worlds and to domesticating warfare through its incorporation in everyday childhood practices. Crucially this focus on the debris of war points that the social life of an artefact 'does not always end with its destruction, quite the contrary. Slashed into pieces, recycled, transformed, it can

continue to live in fragmented form and act as an intermediary onto which people can project their memories, frustrations or experiences' (Van der Hoorn, 2003 p. 189-90).

In that work on the material culture of war focuses on war debris and its re-appropriation and revaluation, it is both establishing its material culture credentials and making a tacit political point. To show how objects fabricated to maim and destroy human life become rubbish value, and how the same 'spent' stuff can be recycled and rekindled in both the memorial and everyday form, is to establish that the material culture of war has biographies and moves through value regimes much like any other commodity (Thompson, 1979; Kopytoff, 1986; Myers, 2001; Gregson and Crewe, 2003). The difference, however, is that this material culture is not just any commodity but part of a military socio-technical system, and debris is the point at which this system and bodies meet. There is a point, then, to focusing on shrapnel and shells; for these are the mass products of an armaments industry that, throughout the twentieth-century (and in the twenty-first), brought widespread death, destruction and disfigurement to civilian and military populations alike. Looking elsewhere in terms of the material culture of war runs the risk of glossing over, or circumventing, this: the transformation of bodily matter through war. And yet, to focus on war debris limits the study of military material culture to periods of warfare, and to particular conflicts at that, whilst promoting a view that much of this material culture is itself consumed and destroyed in the course of conflict. Whilst this clearly does happen, much of military material culture – particularly its platform technologies– is created in advance of and survives periods of conflict, or indeed may never see conflict at all. The material culture of war, then, is in a potential, rather than actual, relation to conflict; the nuclear arsenals of the Cold War are a clear case in point (Solomon, 1988). Furthermore, to focus on war debris from times of conflict and the places where it occurred, to the neglect of other military 'stuff', is to overlook that armaments have required ever more elaborate platforms, or technologies to transport, launch and direct them to targets. Science and technology studies have elaborated the tangled systems, needs, policies and eventual creation of these platform technologies (Mackenzie, 1990; Spinardi, 1994) but rarely their destruction, decommissioning and obsolescence (although see Mort and Michael, 1998; Law 2002). Recognising both the multiple temporalities of the material culture of war, and the

contingent and potential relation of military material culture to conflict, is an important step for the development of the field.

Our focus in the paper is on a set of objects that signal the extended social lives of military material culture, the importance of platform technologies and the contingent relation of military material culture to actual warfare. Rather than focusing on a land-based military material culture, the paper turns to the sea.¹ All of the objects that figure in the paper are (from) ex-naval vessels. Less the 'battleships' of popular imagination, these ships were all support, or auxiliary, vessels, with the primary purpose of delivering equipment, supplies and personnel either to 'the field (of action)' or of keeping other vessels at sea.² One also doubled as a surgical ship during the Falklands/Malvinas War. All of the vessels were in the region of 50 years old at the time of the research on which the paper is based – in itself an indication of the durability of naval platform technologies and the extended lives of these commodities. They were all then in the throes of being demolished and reclaimed for their scrap value. In Thompson's terms then, they were naval vessels of rubbish value. But, whilst they had all been at some time or other involved in conflict operations (WW2, Korea, the Falklands/Malvinas War), all had continued in active service for a period of decades pre and/or post conflict, before being decommissioned, mothballed and then, eventually, sent for scrapping. Less the debris of warfare and more a remaindered military material culture, these ships afford the opportunity to examine a rather different *matériel* culture than has been addressed in the literature hitherto. This rather ordinary, remaindered material culture speaks to the workaday cultures of military masculinities and their commemoration, rather than military events.

The importance of the military as a site for theorising masculinities was acknowledged at the outset of work in men's studies, where its connections to hegemonic masculinity, to an aggressive, misogynistic and heterosexual performance, and to rugged corporealities was

¹ There is a commemorative culture of seafaring and maritime heritage but it has hardly connected to the contemporary military, and focuses on the restoration or recreation of celebrated vessels, rather than the debris from their demise (Laurier, 1998).

² The ships that figure in the paper are: USS Caloosahatchee, USS Canastota, USS Canopus and HMS Intrepid. They were respectively: a fleet oiler (whose role is to transport bulk petroleum to refuel ships at sea); a fleet oiler (the 'sister ship' to Caloosahatchee); a submarine tender for the Polaris fleet of US nuclear submarines; and an amphibious assault ship/landing platform dock. The selection of these ships for discussion was determined by their then presence in some of the breaking yards that figure in our ethnographic work on the ship breaking industry.

widely acknowledged (Morgan, 1987; Connell, 1995). These accounts have been tempered recently by more nuanced work which recognises the changing nature of the relation between militarism and masculinities (Higate and Hopton, 2005; Adelman, 2009); the heterogeneous masculinities involved in military activities (Morgan, 1994; Barrett, 1996), especially across the combat and support roles (Woodward and Winter, 2007 p. 63), as well as the differences between the respective armed services. A key feature of this recent research is the boundary drawn between military and civilian life. Albeit that the permeability of the boundary is acknowledged, most of the interest is in how military life has been affected by the gender and sexual politics of the 1970s and 1980s, especially the incorporation of women into front-line roles, and by the changing shape of militarism, in particular the enhanced humanitarian, peace-keeping and governance roles identified with the military in the 1990s and 2000s. 'Traffic' across the dichotomy therefore has been largely one-way, about formerly civilian values entering the putatively militarised realms. Indeed, in Morgan's work, just passing reference is made to 'cautionary tales' of veterans in a predominantly civilian society, 'their deeds forgotten and their wounds and medals a source of embarrassment and boredom' (ibid, p. 175). By contrast, Paul Higate has explored the 'tenacity of military-masculinity', or its residue, and its effect on post-military, civilian life (Higate, 2000, 2001, 2003). The focus in this work is the often problematic transition from military to civilian life and the propensity for ex-service personnel towards homelessness. Rather than reifying the dichotomy between military and civilian life, this work recognises the lingering co-presence of military subjectivities in everyday life and their importance to understanding the heterogeneity of contemporary masculinities.

Firmly sociological in its tenor, the above literature is noteworthy for its neglect of material culture. And yet, as we show in the paper, for one of the armed services at least, material culture is of supreme importance. This is the Navy – in this case both the British and US navies. Here, and in contrast to the other armed services, where it is either the squadron or the regiment which is the primary attachment, it is the ship – the artefact – which is the object in which military pride is instilled. This, then, is a military identity that is materialised, to a degree perhaps that is unique within the armed services. Reinforced by patterns of posting which may entail extensive periods of time away at sea on one ship (typically up to two years) and by the complete dependency of human life at sea on that object, this

attachment persists into civilian life. Attachment and its persistence is visible in the form of memorial sites; in the large number of associations formed around particular ships, whose membership extends to include potentially all who either served on that ship or who had (or have) some social relation with those who did, and through the manufactured souvenir.³ In this way, naval ships make the social; in this case a geographically distributed sociality of largely ex-service personnel, who materialise their sociality through the purchase of particular mementos, which bear the name or motto of that particular ship. As we show in the paper, the physical death of this ship provides the means to animate this sociality, constituting both a focal point for that sociality and the means to the circulation and exchange of further ship-specific souvenir artefacts. We show how the physical destruction of the ship can become the focus for a complex process of souvenir salvage, memory and forgetting. Clear hierarchies of souvenirs, salvaged from that ship, emerge, whilst souvenirs of military material culture work to destabilise the boundary drawn between civilian and military life. Souvenirs salvaged are collectable as well as collective and personal, and individual acts of souvenir salvage disclose that a military domestic both disrupts current understandings of military material culture and military material culture the civilian domestic. In turn, these findings suggest that work on the souvenir in military material culture can be connected to the wider literature on souvenirs and tourism-related objects, in which hierarchical classifications, debates over provenance, the relationships of manufactured and personal mnemonic objects, and souvenir display within the home have all figured strongly (Gordon, 1986; Habermas and Paha, 2002; Hashimoto and Telfer, 2007; Ramsey, 2009).

Materialising ex-naval identities and subjectivities⁴

³ Given the size of their full crew compliment and years of active service, potential membership figures of > 10000 would not be unreasonable estimates for all of the ships in this paper. Membership comprised of former junior ratings predominantly, and not officers. Although it is not possible to generalise from this, it is thought that this pattern of membership is widespread. Current membership figures for the two associations with which we worked are: > 630 for HMS Intrepid and >460 for USS Canopus. They provide further evidence for the importance of residue military masculinities.

⁴ The research on which this and the following section is based involved 12 months of ethnographic work in a breaking yard in the UK and with two veterans associations (USS Canopus and HMS Intrepid). The latter included: attendance at reunion events in San Diego, US and Birmingham, UK, a recorded focus group discussion with core members of the HMS Intrepid Association, and virtual ethnography, drawing on postings and discussion threads on the members' areas of association websites. The data on which we draw here includes: camcorder and still photography, analysed in conjunction with field notes, recorded interviews, and web page posts.

War memorials and military cemeteries comprise two of the clearest instances of the materialisation of sacrifice and loss through material culture, and constitute a distinctive focus within the body of work dedicated to death, memory and material culture (King, 1999; Rowlands, 1999). The focal issue in these sites, however, remains human death, sacrifice and loss, reconciliation and transcendence. That this is so is not at issue. But the category of military memorialisation and commemoration is not exclusively confined to the human. Within the US Navy Memorial in Washington DC, for example, alongside the statuary and commemoration of key events and communities in US naval history, is a plaque wall materialising the memory of a few individuals but mostly particular ships (Figure 1). Placed there by Reunion Associations in private dedication ceremonies, these plaques typically include the name and an image of the ship, the dates of its commissioning and decommissioning, its motto, and a key event in its military life. Further, dedication ceremonies will include a virtual link to the ship and crew that bears the same name, if that name has been taken up again by the US Navy. Such acts of object memorialisation are rare in military commemoration, where the preserved objects are primarily illustrative of a generic category, notably the guns, tanks, planes or armaments in most military museums. Here though, it is a particular ship, its social life, and its connection to another ship with the same name but another social life that matters.

Memorial plaques are perhaps the clearest indication of the part human status of the ship within naval military culture. Another is the Stanley Bleifeld statue The Lone Sailor in the same US Navy Memorial site (Figure 2). A bronze figurative of 'the US Navy bluejacket, past, present and future', the brief for this public art form resonates strongly with hegemonic military masculinities:

'At 25 years old at most, a senior second-class petty officer who is fast becoming a sea-going veteran. He has done it all – fired his weapons in a dozen wars, weighed anchor from a thousand ports, tracked supplies, doused fires, repelled boarders, typed in quadruplicate and mess cooked. He has made liberty call in great cities and tiny villages, where he played tourist ambassador, missionary to the poor, adventurer, souvenir shopper and friend to new lands ...'

(<http://www.navymemorial.org>).

Yet, materially, the statue is more than this. The bronze of The Lone Sailor was mixed in casting with artefacts from eight US naval vessels spanning the history of the US Navy from the post Revolution period through to a nuclear-powered submarine. Like Hans Haacke's mixing of the earth from all the German Lander in the foundation of the new Reichstag, showing the fusing of peoples, (Wagner, 2007), this aesthetic move is indicative of the folding of the collective naval seafaring body with the collective ship of the US Navy. The fabrication of this bronze embodies the point that ships physically make naval identities, subjectivities and socialities.

The connection between ships, socialities and subjectivities is most visible in the large number of naval veteran's associations in both the US and UK. Although not all decommissioned ships have active associations, those that do generally involve the following features. Of primary importance is that the associations work to constitute a distributed virtual and face-to-face sociality of former crew, and others related to them. Scattered across the UK and the US, or beyond, and akin to Facebook and/or Friends Reunited, these virtual communities of ex-naval personnel are oriented to catching-up with old 'mates' and acquaintances. The Canopus Association, for example, is described as 'a place where old friends and ship mates can come together and rehash old times' (<http://usscanopus.org>), whilst the Intrepid Association states that this is a forum for 'old shipmates to pull up a bollard and swing a lantern' (<http://www.hmsintrepid.com>). Such statements were reiterated in a focus group discussion comprising six HMS Intrepid Association members (denoted A – F in subsequent extracts):

C: "... To me the ship's here (pointing to the heart and to his 'mates' around the table)

NG: It's about the social

C: the camaraderie. There are guys that we see who are still joining the Association and still putting their name forward, and you think 'Bloody, hell. Is he still around? You know'.

Face-to-face meetings are normally focused around an annual reunion event - to which wives and partners typically come along - and public dates of military remembrance, notably

Remembrance Sunday in the UK and Veteran's Day in the US. A second area of activity that all associations engage in is materialising their sociality through material culture. At one level this is what memorial plaques are about. Indeed, we would argue that the act of memorialising their ship is constitutive for these associations, even if its mode of doing might vary. At another level, however, materialisation connects with a sociality of the present. The means to this is through a range of manufactured symbolic and iconic souvenirs, typically tie pins and lapel badges in the UK, and t-shirts and baseball caps in the US (Figure 3). These souvenirs are worn by association members in an everyday sense – on work clothing, for example, or as leisure wear. The Intrepid Association members again:

NG: "What occasions would you wear these things on? Obviously a day like this when you're all together

A: Remembrance Day [...]

D: I wear mine with a jacket every day to work

NG: You wear it every day?

E: Yeah – I wear my veterans badge every day at work on my suit

NG: Would that that be something that quite a lot of people do?

E: Yeah, I see quite a few when I've been going into companies – there's a couple of the security guards that have got the

C: And it's the Veterans badge as well as the Intrepid badge [...] people, you can see their eye being, and you can't read the word Intrepid [...] and then you would kind of explain, 'I used to be in the Navy and that was the ship that I served in' and that kind of breaks the ice.

In contrast, albeit a source of pride, medals are only worn at association reunion events and public memorial days. Admitted into public life only on days such as Remembrance Sunday or Veterans Day, and stuffed in suitcases along with all manner of other family memorabilia (Hallam and Hockey, 2001), medals are a form of military material culture that do not sit easily in civilian life. And yet, clearly, there is a felt need on the part of ex-service personnel

to materialise past military lives in present lives. It is this gap that the manufactured souvenir fills, enabling ex-service naval personnel to materialise these past identities and a specific naval sociality in everyday public space

A ship's decommissioning, then, constitutes a social death which works to animate the distributed and predominantly virtual sociality of former crew, who both commemorate that ship and mark its importance in their lives through the manufactured souvenir. The latter works as much to constitute a public sociality of the present for ex-service personnel as it does to indicate an absent presence. The social death of the ship, however, eventually connects up to its physical destruction, although the temporal gap between social and physical death, first and second burial (Hertz, 1960), can be considerable. In the following section we examine how the process of destruction plays out within the dynamic of the souvenir and the association, focusing on the instance of HMS Intrepid.

Becoming ghostly: pilgrimage, souvenir salvage and destruction

One of the most striking points about the USS Canastota memorial plaque in Figure 1 is that, at exactly the same time as this plaque was being photographed on a wall in Washington DC (May 2008), its precise physical referent was in Graythorp, Teesside (UK), where it had been since November 2003 (Figure 4), along with the USS Caloosahatchee, USS Canopus and USS Compass Island. Prior to that, the USS Canastota, along with a large number of other vessels including Caloosahatchee, Canopus and Compass Island had been languishing in the James River, Virginia (US), as part of the US ghost fleet. Ghost fleets comprise ships mothballed and in a limbo of no longer sailing yet not yet scrapped. But becoming ghostly is clearly not something that is acknowledged on the memorial plaques, where what matters is to memorialise the active life of the ship, and to separate this out from its physical decay. Of critical importance to this paper, however, is that the passage into ghostliness is one in which remaindered military material culture moves through distinctive value regimes; in this case, from sites where return is possible (in the case of these ships, the James River, or deep storage in Portsmouth), to geographically distant sites where their military value has been stripped out and the remaining value is located in materials and their recovery for recycling. So, on Teesside, these ships, whilst still in the recognisable form of naval ships, are no longer

seagoing and are ships becoming metal/wastes, predominantly tonnes and tonnes of scrap steel, lesser weights of copper and brass, and tonnes of asbestos (Hillier, 2009).

The passage of naval vessels through value regimes is one which is no different to that which has been tracked in relation to cloth and textiles (Tranberg-Hanson, 2000; Norris, 2008, 2010). That is, throughout much of the latter part of the twentieth-century, discarded US and UK naval vessels passed through various chains of ownership, eventually to be broken-up. Protracted storage and then breaking in often distant commercial yards makes it difficult for ex-service personnel to re-enact their attachment to a particular ship at the point of its physical death. The latter, though, is a common desire. As disposal authorities acknowledge, as well as animating a sociality of former crew, the social death of any naval ship is likely to trigger the compulsion for this sociality to unite around a campaign to 'save our ship' – in effect, a desire to preserve the vessel, usually by imagining that vessel as a future museum, hotel, training ship, or whatever. On passing into the ownership of a breaking company, this attachment usually manifests itself again, typically in the form of requests to visit 'their ship', 'one last time'. Whilst some breaking companies regard such requests as a distraction or irrelevance and dismiss them out of hand, others may allow this. The distinction maps into, on the one hand, business focused on the economics of scrap metal and, on the other, business which recognises that some of the stuff of the ship is also open to souvenir value. As we show here, this latter model enables a re-affirmed sociality through acts of personal and collective souvenir salvage, memory and forgetting.

Ethnographic fieldwork examining the break-up of HMS Intrepid highlighted three distinct phases of Association engagement with 'disposal'. The first is 'the return', distributed in this instance between Portsmouth and Canada Dock, Bootle, Liverpool. This entailed the witnessing of the final tow of the ship from its site of naval storage to its arrival at the location of physical destruction, and an Open-Day there for Association members and their families, prior to the commencement of destructive work. Whilst the first practice echoes those associated with former ship building communities, who would line coastlines to watch cruise ships and liners they had built 'coming home to die' (Rae and Smith, 2001), the latter is more akin to battlefield pilgrimage/tourisms (Figure 5). Thus, the Association Open-Day was characterised by practices of still and camcorder photography, later posted on the Association's website, and accompanied by the widespread appropriation of small personal

mementos, in return for a donation to a charity specified by the business concerned – in effect a form of gift exchange in the interstices of the breaking business. The majority of the mementos salvaged were highly personal, and indicative of the mnemonic importance of a military domestic rather than objects identifiably from this particular ship or even identifiably military. They were small items of signage or small objects identified with either mess decks (the equivalent of ‘home’ at sea) and/or sites of onboard work (Figure 6).

Distinctively different, however, is the workings of embodied memory. For Association members, a key memory of the Open-Day was of their body’s remembering. Post after post on the Association’s website refers to the initial retracing of long forgotten but strangely familiar routes between distinctive locations onboard (bunk, mess deck and site of work, in that order). To an onlooker unfamiliar with the ship, this appeared a veritable maze, navigated – it should be added – by the light of a torch beam, since a decommissioned ship is a ship with no power. This – and more – is captured vividly in the following extract, recorded accompanying one such journey back to a site of work, down in the tightly confined, bordering on claustrophobic, pitch black depths of the ship’s boiler house:

“... They’re two steam driven turbines – they used to supply all the electricity – this brings back memories I tell you – the noise wasn’t too bad; there was a lot of screening ‘Whheeeee’ – you had ear defenders on, and it was just like a mosquito in your ear defenders. The heat – well, it’d depend on where you were in the world, but I did feel the heat. Somewhere in the world, the West Indies or that, the heat was unbearable sometimes. You’d stand on the supply fan and you’d open your overalls up, like that. Nothing on underneath and you’d be getting all the wind down your trouser legs!! Ohhhhhh. Massive! Great fun. That there was the clutch for the ballast pump, if I remember right. Yes it was. Was this the shaft or the main feed tank? (Question/comment – I don’t know how know what you were doing down here, you must have spent years). Well we knew every single pipe – you actually, engineers used to learn it in a couple of weeks when you joined the ship; the first thing you’d get was a notebook and a pencil and you’d trace the systems around and you’d make a mental map of where everything was. You’d rely on your sketches as well – that’s a drain cooler that – there should be a salinometer around here somewhere – there it is –

there's the salinometer! How on earth did I remember that? How did I remember that?! I haven't been on this ship in 26 years!" [Camcorder footage, September 2008]

Here is a body remembering, delighting in that memory and in showing it, simultaneously making sense of a space and a socio-technical system, to a range of onlooker tourists, including his children, a business representative, other Association members (who until then had had no knowledge of this space onboard) and a researcher (HW). All look, attempt to record the moment visually, and gasp at his capacity to have worked in this space in those conditions; to know the intricacies of the labyrinth of its pipe work, and to be able to recall it all, in the dark, kinaesthetically, 26 years on. But what is also noted in post after post is corporeal time. Whilst the body remembers, time has simultaneously marked the body: squeezing through the kidney hatches – 'were they really so small?!'; trying to slide down the gangways, and landing in a heap; the ladders' affect on the knees. So, what this prompts is a nostalgic return to old photographs and postings in galleries, of pictures of much younger, then 'skinny/scrawny' 'boys' in naval uniforms, and an acknowledging and 'ribbing' of thicker girths and of agilities and fitness lost.

A second phase of engagement was demarcated by the lengthy process of remediation and physical destruction lasting 11 months; the accompanying fissuring of the ship into distinct materials streams, and its transformation from a singular, stabilised and coherent object into distributed objects. The latter process was effected by the posting of large numbers of items on eBay by the breaking company; a deliberate tactic to maximise the value in memorabilia and to constitute a market of the fragments from the ship.⁵ For several Association members this proved a temptation impossible to resist. In this phase resistant material is transformed into a social world, of both people and things with a distributed sense of personhood whilst artefacts become occasions for often shared recollection and reminiscence as well as private satisfaction. In Heideggerian terms, it is an 'ensemble of acts and efforts' whereby human beings attempt to extract meaning from materials to unify the 'scattered practices' of a group so it 'first fits together and at the same time gathers around

⁵ Parallel markets selling salvaged fittings as memorabilia from more glamorous commercial vessels can be found, with web sites such as midshipcentury.com selling fittings bought from ships being broken in South Asia.

itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny' (Trotter, 2008 p.9). Yet, in recreating one social world, these same artefacts clash with the contemporary social worlds of former sailors, as signalled by the post which relayed how, having bought a telephone exchange (Figure 7), the successful bidder was anticipating 'the wrath of The Missus'. Rather more muted, but in the same register, is the following extract from the focus group discussion:

F: I don't think my wife would like a big bulkhead! 'Just bought a security gate'!!

NG: You know the memorabilia that you've taken, where did you put it when you got back home?

C: I've only got a couple; one was a door sign – 'Catering Coordinator', and that's going on a shelf quite literally where my globes are. Because, the first thing my wife said to me was "And where's that going to go??" "Here!!"

Acquiring the personal souvenir from this ship, then, is one thing; accommodating it within the domestic setting of the family home is entirely another – thus the one place the sign of catering coordinator, and its connotations of unglamorous military domesticities, is not allowed is the kitchen. The fungibility of some artefacts serves to render them disruptive to their new locations, as do their 'untamed' memories. Indeed, unlike the WWI mementos wrought from scrap, these mementos of military material culture are admitted only into backstage areas, to storage areas of the home such as sheds and garages, and to rooms that are the preserve of the men themselves. Like medals, these are difficult items of military material culture to admit into civilian life. At best ambivalent accommodations within a familial home, we suggest that they are so not just because their military, functional aesthetic is discordant with prevailing home aesthetics but because these objects are redolent with nostalgia and loss, symbolic of the home's continued potential exposure to sacrifice, and an all too tangible reminder (for these women) of other attachments and identifications out with the current civilian realm (Higate and Cameron, 2004).

Whilst much memorabilia acquisition was conducted personally, the stripping of potential sentimental value from the ship also precipitated a few acts of collective purchase by the

Association. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of one of the ship's funnel badges (Figure 8). This purchase seems to have been motivated by a narrative whereby the Association regarded themselves as the rightful collective owners of this highly symbolic object, countering their potential ownership to an imagined, anonymous, and by implication undeserving, collector of military memorabilia (Gronberg, 1999). This act of purchase signals just how much the process of the ship's destruction continued to make the social. Veterans' associations are able to forge a social economy of the fragments, grounded in collective rights that turn on identification, belonging and prior habitation, and they assert this within a market economy of the fragments located in property rights and the equivalence of exchange, even whilst having to operate within the market economy to secure an object that they regard as rightfully 'theirs'. Moreover, their collective action reveals a hierarchy of souvenir value in the memorabilia emanating from the vessel – demarcated by the separation between the collective purchase and individual purchases and marked by the distinction between different orders of souvenirs. All the souvenirs salvaged are indexically linked to the ship but those reinforced by bearing the ship's name, or an identifiable symbol, on them (an inscribed provenance), stand above those that merely have an orally narrated provenance.

The process of exchange and revaluation through eBay is a means to constitute and realise souvenir value, to memorialise this ship, and to do so in ways which utilise the fragments acquired to own the memory of that which is being destroyed. It is important to acknowledge, however, that this was going on against the continued backdrop of the vessel's physical break up and gradual, inexorable disappearance (Figure 9 a - c). There is little doubt that the posting of regular images of this brutal process on the Association's web pages by some members was something that many found difficult to engage with yet unable to resist looking at. These feelings coalesced around the moment at which the ship disappeared as a recognisable form and transformed into piles and piles of debris, scrap metal on the dry dock floor. The posts at this juncture are instructive:

"Doesn't get any easier looking at her being broken up. Won't be long till all that's left is our photos"

“Now that is sad, sad, SAD. To see that pile of junk sitting there where a fine ship once stood is sickening”

“Sad, sad pictures. Such a great ship and now just a pile of scrap at the bottom of a dry dock. Fair brings tears to the eyes”

The visibility and visualising of the process of destruction and disappearance renders Association members collective witnesses of ‘their ship’s’ mutation from ‘great’ to ‘junk’ and of its transformation from ship to debris. The sadness and tears are palpable emotions here, and what we are looking at here is surely a death, and a death which, in its violence and futility (at least in the eyes of Association members) is being thought of at least partially through sacrifice. Further confirmation of this reading is provided by subsequent endeavours around the funnel badge. Purchased initially as an active marker of the collective rights of a former crew in the object of the ship, the funnel badge began to morph through the process of destruction to suggest itself as an appropriate memorial object; a means to achieve transcendence. The difficulty facing the Association though was in how to effect this, socially and physically. Initially, the intent was to place this object in the National Memorial Arboretum. This was refused – because this is a site in which ship memorialisation is reserved for vessels lost in conflict and involving loss of human life, and does not extend to include decommissioned ships. The intent should be read not for its error – to anthropomorphize and to conflate ship death with human death – but precisely through its error. In attempting to memorialise ‘their ship’ through constituting a memorial from the funnel badge, the Association, and its members, is attempting to forget, to reconcile the loss of ‘their ship’, and to achieve what all public acts of memorialisation attempt. At the same time, their acts disclose the unique status of the ship within naval culture. That they have, at the time of writing this paper, yet to effect this materialisation is both an indication of the difficulties of memorialising the quasi object and of the social difficulties that public acts of remembrance and reconciliation entail (King, 1999). This constitutes the third phase identified by our ethnographic fieldwork. The ship has disappeared and become ghostly; souvenirs have been salvaged; but this is a destruction that has not yet been forgotten. Rather, it remains a painful sacrifice and a violent, strangely unbecoming death.

Conclusions

Extending the compass of work on the material culture of war to acknowledge the extended social life of military things, the connection of end-of-life things to resource recovery regimes, and the importance of platform technologies as cultural artefacts within a military material culture has implications. In terms of the material culture of war, we want to make three points. First, and following from our emphasis on military objects with a social life beyond conflict, we highlight that – particularly with the rise of humanitarian and peace-keeping activities within the armed forces – military artefacts cannot be thought of as inexorably connected to war debris. Rather, they are commodities, and – like all commodities – they move between value regimes. Significant here is that, in order for them to move between value regimes, these objects need to be stripped of both their deadly and ‘sensitive’ capacities. They need to cease to be military. Thus divested, military material culture flows through international second-hand markets much like discarded fashion, and it is important to recognise this. But, stripping these objects of their military hardware does not strip them of their naval meanings, and this is poignantly evidenced by the attachments of former crew to ‘their ship’, which remains ‘their ship’ even when both object and people are no longer naval. Second, focusing on the extended social life of military things allows us to elaborate on existing arguments regarding souvenirs and military material culture. Current work in the field positions souvenirs in relation to an anterior debris. The souvenir of the material culture of war is wrought, manufactured or collected from debris. In our work, by contrast, the souvenir is that which is salvaged from that which is about to disappear. Its affinities therefore are more with salvage’s connection to iconoclasm/destruction (Forty, 1999; Kuechler, 2002) than to recycling. That this is so connects to a third point: the potency of military material culture within residual military masculinities. A clear message from this research is that artefacts, acts of souvenir salvage and memorialisation constitute things that matter for many ex-service personnel. That they do so is no more, no less than indicative of the workings of material culture more broadly, where ‘material culture shoulders the larger responsibility of our personal and collective memory. The corollary of this, of course, is that the decay or destruction of these objects brings forgetfulness’ (Buchli and Lucas, 2001 p. 80). Amongst material culture it is the souvenir of this world apart, of a lost *communitas*, that offers to make memory portable – and in so doing both enables a distantiated community but also introduces fractured belonging into home spaces.

Of wider significance is the contrast opened up by the central sections of the paper. Much of the literature on the biography of things acknowledges, but does not dwell on, the importance of spatial differentiation or geographical displacement to the re-enchantment of things. The biography of things is co-produced by the geographical mobility of things. But, unlike the distanced trashing of clothes, obscured by their deposit in charity bins, where imagined reuse slides into most likely destruction and refabrication, here, we see a situation in which value regimes crumple, wrinkle and fold in the confines of a single site, where souvenir salvage and memorabilia rub up against violent destruction, resource recovery and waste remediation work. One result is to render the destructive work of disappearance highly visible and to constitute ex-naval personnel as collective witnesses to this process. The identification with, and attachment forged to, naval vessels as part of naval culture means that practices of commemoration and memorialisation are coloured by melancholy. The naval ship as quasi object opens up the category of object death as an under-examined yet important facet of the social life of things. Unlike human and animal death, object sacrifice and death is a category that is rarely acknowledged within western societies and consequently hard to mark and to materialise publically as part of the material culture of death. The contradiction of recycling as creative destruction, and the souvenir as preservation, coalesce in the souvenir as artefact; the souvenirs salvaged here are not only mementos of former and present community, but also memento mori – of loss, and death, and fractured belonging.

A final point is signalled by an observation of several ex-service personnel, that somehow – if we are to paraphrase – ‘razor blades do not become her’. Resource recovery and recycling more generally tend to be thought through the lens of re-enchantment (Hawkins, 2006). They are, so the argument goes, technologies and transformations that open-up possible futures; that work to revalue discarded stuff, and that move stuff out of rubbish value. And yet these technologies are also levelling technologies that rest on materialist foundations. They insist on an equivalence between objects in their potential futures that is an equivalence of materials. So, Intrepid may not just become razor blades but potentially anything that steel can be fabricated into, as well as distributed across a potentially infinite range of such objects, of variable value. For these ex-service personnel though, such an imagined future is an unworthy one and a strangely unsettling thought. It is not too much to

say that Intrepid the object now haunts their razor blades as they look in the mirror each morning as they shave. A less mundane, but connected, point is that resource recovery regimes may release ghosts. The rise of secondary materials as a basis for object manufacture rests on the destruction of objects and, as with Marx's coat (Stallybrass, 1998), the allied stripping of meaning from objects to release the materials. But objects like those that figure in this paper persist long beyond their disappearance, and may even enhance their potency through the manner of their disappearance. They suggest that, as with other acts of iconoclasm, certain destroyed objects may not be forgotten; that – through recycling - they have the capacity to haunt others, that might just be them, in another guise; and that haunting can work through reincarnation as well as the absent presence, and in a distributed sense, across object categories and not just in relation to specific sites and singular objects. It is the vessel's destruction, ceasing to be an ongoing entity, which purifies its celebration in memory, unalloyed by the mundane complexities of current use. Sometimes, then, contra Tim Ingold (2007), materials do not always win out over objects in the end. The death of great naval ships may well be one of those occasions.

Acknowledgements

Tbc after review

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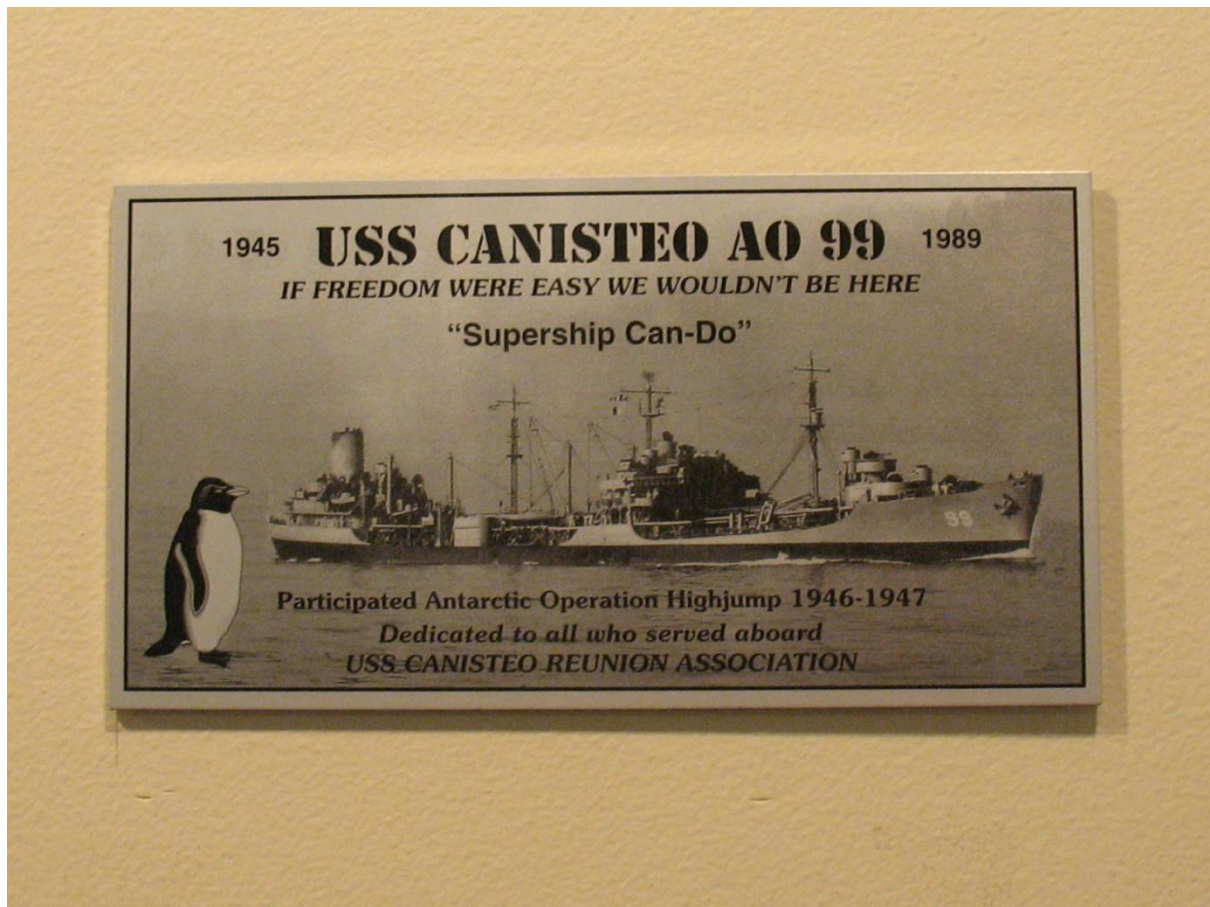


Figure 1: USS Canisteo Memorial Plaque



Figure 2: Stanley Bleifeld: The Lone Sailor, US Navy Memorial, Washington DC

Figure 3 –Manufactured Memorabilia



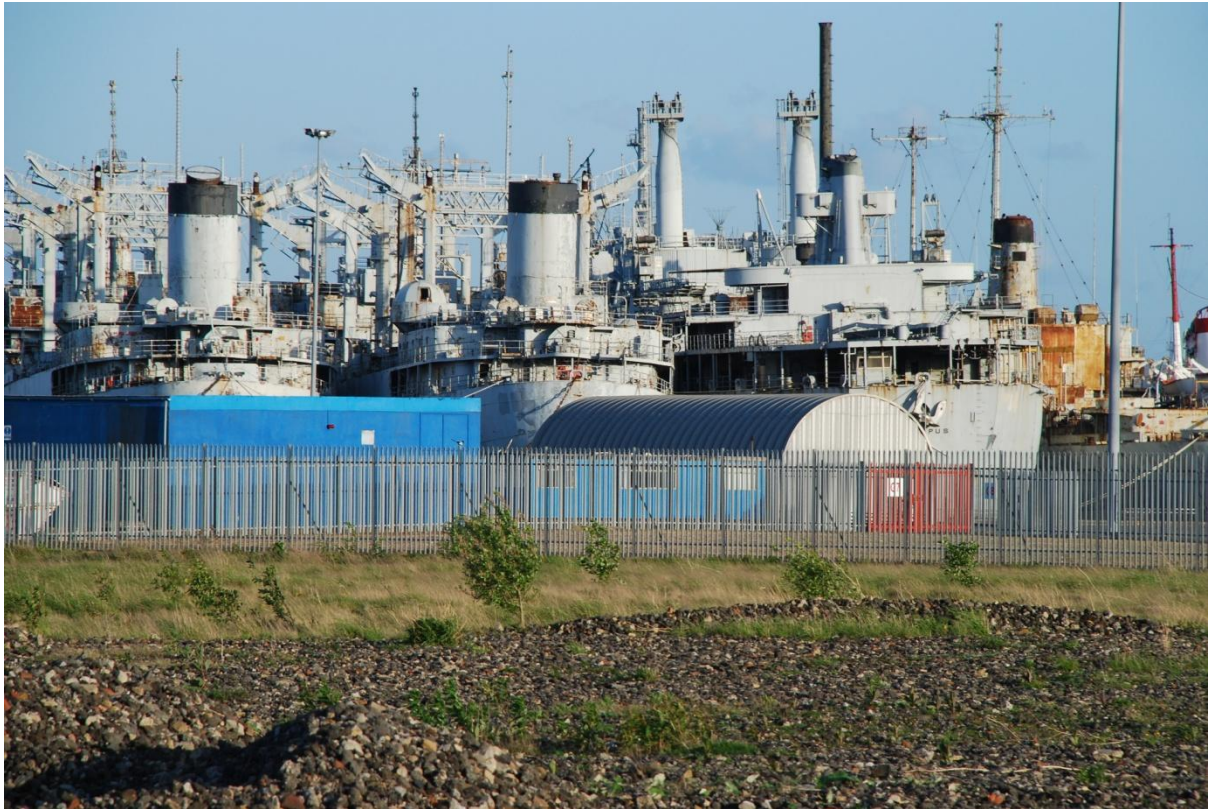


Figure 4: Becoming ghostly: USS Caloosahatchee and USS Canopus, with USS Canisteo and USS Compass Island, Graythorp 2008.



Figure 5: HMS Intrepid Association members: Open-Day



Figure 6: Souvenir salvage

Figure 7

Figure 7: Telephone exchange



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Figure 8: HMS Intrepid port side funnel badge



Figure 9a: HMS Intrepid: October 2008



Figure 9b: HMS Intrepid: April 2009



Figure 9c: HMS Intrepid's ghost: July 2009